

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: A
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJECT: LAW-AND-ORDER DOMINATES PROVINCIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN
IN VITERBO

REF: ROME 7381

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY OFFICERS RECENTLY TALKED TO POLITICAL
LEADERS IN VITERBO, ONE OF THE TWO ITALIAN PROVINCES WHICH
WILL ELECT NEW PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIONS ON MAY 14/15. WITH
THE POLLING LESS THAN TWO WEEKS AWAY, ALL THE PARTIES CAN-
VASSER AGREED THAT:
--UNLIKE PAST PROVINCIAL CONTESTS IN VITERBO, NATIONAL
RATHER THAN LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES WOULD
DOMINATE THE ELECTIONS.
--LAW AND ORDER (AND THE MORO KIDNAPPING) FAR OUT-
DISTANCED THE ECONOMY AND UNEMPLOYMENT AS THE NUMBER
ONE ISSUE.
--THE MORO CASE WILL BENEFIT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS
(DC), BUT ITS FULL IMPACT IS AS YET DIFFICULT TO
MEASURE. NONE EXPECT THE PCI VOTE TO DECLINE.
WHILE ALL THE PARTIES HAD POSTERS UP AND ELECTION
MEETINGS SCHEDULED, ONLY DC AND PCI OFFICES GAVE EVIDENCE
OF ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN THE CAMPAIGN. EVEN THE MINOR

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PARTIES CANDIDLY PERCEIVE THE ELECTION IN POLARIZED
TERMS AS A TEST OF DC AND PCI STRENGTH. END SUMMARY.

2. ELECTION BACKGROUND. A PREDOMINANTLY AGRICULTURAL
PROVINCE NORTH OF ROME IN LAZIO, VITERBO HAS BEEN AD-
MINISTERED BY A PCI-PSI-PSDI LEFT GIUNTA SINCE
THE LAY PARTIES WITHDREW THEIR COOPERATION WITH THE

DC AFTER THE 1976 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. WHILE THE DC VOTE HAS REMAINED FAIRLY STEADY AT 38 PERCENT IN RECENT YEARS, THE PCI UNSEATED THE DC AS THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE 1976 POLITICAL ELECTIONS (OBTAINING 39.6 PERCENT OF THE VOTE). THE SOCIALIST SHARE OF THE VOTE (DOWN TO 6.6 PERCENT IN 1976) IN VITERBO IS CONSIDERABLY LOWER THAN THE PARTY'S NATIONAL STANDING (9.1 PERCENT), BUT THE NEO-FASCIST MSI STRENGTH (8.7 PERCENT IN 1976) IS PROPORTIONATELY HIGHER (6.1 PERCENT NATIONALLY)

3. NATIONAL ISSUES AND TENDENCIES DOMINATE. THE SMALL LAY PARTIES TRADITIONALLY DO BETTER IN PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN WHICH LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES CAN PLAY A LARGER ROLE. THIS TIME, HOWEVER, ALL THE PARTIES CANVASSING BELIEVE THAT NATIONAL THEMES WILL PREDOMINATE, WORKING TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE DC AND PCI. OVERSHADOWING PROBLEMS OF THE ECONOMY AND UNEMPLOYMENT. THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE IS CLEARLY LAW-AND-ORDER AS GRAPHICALLY REPRESENTED BY THE MORO KIDNAPPING. WHILE ALL AGREED THAT THE DC WILL BENEFIT FROM THE MORO CASE, NONE WAS WILLING TO HAZARD PREDICTIONS GIVEN THE UNCERTAINTIES AS TO HOW THE KIDNAPPING WILL IMPACT ON THE VOTING. THUS, BEFORE THE MORO KIDNAPPING THE LIBERALS HAD EXPECTED TO GAIN FROM THEIR NEW NATIONAL OPPOSITION ROLE, AN OUTCOME THEY NOW REGARD AS UNCERTAIN. IN ADDITION, THE MINOR PARTIES CLEARLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LACK THE FUNDS TO RUN AN AGGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN. THE PSI REPRESENTATIVE SAID THAT HIS PARTY WAS FULLY DEPENDENT ON VOLUNTEER EFFORTS.

4. LOCAL ISSUES ARE NOT EXPECTED TO EXERT MUCH INFLUENCE ON ELECTION RESULTS. HERE THE ISSUES ARE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATE UNIVERSITY WHICH WOULD DRAW STUDENTS (LEFTIST-ORIENTED, IT IS FEARED) FROM THE OVERCROWDED FACILITIES IN ROME, AND PLANS FOR A NUCLEAR POWER STATION AT MONTALTO IN THE RICH MAREMMA AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT WEST OF VITERBO. THE DC AND PCI SUPPORT BOTH PROJECTS (ALREADY APPROVED BY PARLIAMENT). THE PSI HAS TAKEN AN AMBIVALENT STANCE ON NUCLEAR-POWER, CITING POSSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS: THE LIBERALS ARGUE THAT NEITHER PROJECT SHOULD HAVE BEEN FORCED ON VITERBO BY THE CENTER WITHOUT CONSULTING THE LOCAL POPULACE.

5. DC RUNNING LAW-AND-ORDER CAMPAIGN. AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, THE DC HAS WARNED PARTY WORKERS NOT "TO DENATURE THE TERMS OF THE POLLING/ BY EXPLOITING THE MORO CASE, BUT IN VITERBO THE DC IS CLEARLY NOT SHY ABOUT USING

THE MORO ISSUE TO WIN VOTES. DC PROVINCIAL SECRETARY RENZO TRAPPOLINI TOLD US, HOWEVER, THAT ALTHOUGH THE MORO KIDNAPPING WOULD BENEFIT THE DC ON THE SHORT-TERM, VOTER PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT INERTIA AND INABILITY TO COPE WITH TERRORISM COULD HELP THE PCI OVER THE LONGER TERM. AT ANY RATE, TRAPPOLINI DID NOT BELIEVE THE PCI WILL INCUR A SETBACK.

6. BUT LOCAL DC IS DIVIDED. TRAPPOLINI HIMSELF REPRESENTS THE NEW GENERATION IN DC POLITICS, HAVING OUSTED THE OLD-GUARD AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-EIGHT AFTER THE DC'S POOR 1976 SHOWING IN VITERBO. TO TRAPPOLINI'S PCI COUNTERPART, HE IS AN ANDREOTTIANO WHO HAS STAYED IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OLD POSITION ON THE DC'S RIGHT. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO THE FANFANIANO OLD-GUARD SUCH AS THE MAYOR OF VITERBO, HOWEVER, TRAPPOLINI IS SUFFICIENTLY UNPRINCIPLED AND AMBITIOUS TO LEAD THE DC INTO SOME FORM OF INSTITUTIONALIZED POST-ELECTION ACCOMMODATION WITH THE PCI. TRAPPOLINI DISCOUNTS THIS POSSIBILITY, POINTING TO THE CONSERVATIVE PROFILE OF THE DC IN VITERBO. AS TRAPPOLINI ONLY CONTROLS JUST OVER 50 PERCENT OF THE LOCAL DC, THE WELL PUBLICIZED INTERNAL BICKERING HAS

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HARMED THE PARTY LOCALLY.

7. AND RECEIVES LITTLE SUPPORT FROM DC SECRETARIAT. TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, TRAPPOLINI COMPLAINED THAT THE DC NATIONAL SECRETARIAT UNDER ZACCAGNINI PROVIDES LITTLE GUIDANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL HELP. ASKED ABOUT THE TWO MEETINGS RECENTLY HELD IN ROME ON ELECTION PREPARATIONS, TRAPPOLINI SAID THEY WERE "USELESS" AND DESIGNED ESSENTIALLY TO DEMONSTRATE THE PARTY'S SOLIDARITY WITH MORO. MOREOVER, HE CLAIMED HE RECEIVED NO FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM ROME FOR THE CAMPAIGN. ALTHOUGH THE DC OFFICES (LIKE THE PCI'S GAVE EVIDENCE OF CAMPAIGN BUSTLE AND ACITIVITY, TRAPPOLINI SAID THATIN CONTRAST TO THE PCI'S EFFICIENT AND WELL-FINANCED OPERATION,HE AND HIS FRIENDS HAD TO RELY ON THEIR WITS AND INITIATIVE.

8. PCI STRESSES POLITICAL UNITY. UGO SPOSETTI, THE PCI PROVINCIAL SECRETARY, WOULD FIT HOLLYWOOD CASTING'S DESCRIPTION OF AN UPWARD-MOBILE YOUNG EXECUTIVE. ACCORDING TO TRAPPOLINI, LIKE HIMSELF, SPOSETTI TOOK OVER THE OLD GUARD A FEW YEARS AGO, BUT UNLIKE TRAPPOLINI SPOSETTI GETS THE FULL SUPPORT OF PARTY HEADQUARTERS. SPOSETTI TOLD US THAT ELECTIONS WERE NOT SO IMPOR-

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TANT AS OPPORTUNITIES TO WIN VOTES AS THEY WERE CHANCES TO MOBILIZE PUBLIC OPINION FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES. THEMOMENT CALLED FOR FIRMNESS AND UNITY IN DEALING WITH TERRORISM. WHILE THE MORO KIDNAPPING WOULD HELP THE DC, HE HOPED THE LOCAL PARTY WOULD NOT TRY TOEXPLOIT THE ISSUE.IN RESPONSE TO OUR QUESTION, HE DOUBTED THAT THE PCI WOULD RENEW ITS BID FOR AN EMERGENCY GOVERNMENT IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

9. BUT DC LOCAL OPPOSITION ROLE IRKS. SPOSETTI LAMENTED THAT THE RESPONSIBLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DC AND THE PCI ON THE NATIONAL SCENE WAS NOT DUPLICATED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. HE COMPLAINED THAT TRAPPOLINI WAS "HARD" IN HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PCI AND COMMENTED THAT THE DC (AND THE MIS) REMAINED STRONG IN VITERBO CITY BECAUSE OF VESTED ECONOMIC INTERESTS. HE NONETHELESS BELIEVED THAT THE PCI WOULD SHOW ELECTION GAINS. THEEXTRA PARLIAMENTARY LEFT WAS WEAK AND DIVIDED IN VITERBO AND POSED NO THREAT TO THE PCI. AND HE DENIED THAT THE PCI WOULD BE WEAKENED BY VOTER ASSOCIATIONS OF THE PARTY WITH VIOLENCE BY CLAIMING, SOMEWHAT DISINGENUOUSLY, THAT THE REF BRIGADES' VERY LANGUAGE WAS ALIEN TO PCI TRADITIONS.

10. ELECTIN PROSPECTS. DESPITE THEUNCERTAIN IMPACT
OF THE MORO KIDNAPPING ON THE ELCTIONS, OUR INTERLOCUTORS
BELIEVE THAT BOTH THE DC AND PCI WILL GAIN IN THE
VITERBO CONTEST. THE QUESTION IS BY HOW MUCH? AS
LONG AS THE PSI AND LAY PARTIES WITHHOLD POLITICAL
COOPERATION FROM THE DC (AND THE BITTEREST ATTACKS ON
THE DC WE HEARD IN VITERBO CAME FROM THE PSI),
EVEN IF THE DC REGAINS ITS POSITION AS THE LARGEST
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PARTY IN THE PROVINCE IT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO WREST
CONTROL OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FROM THE PCI.
LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERS ARE AGREED,HOWEVER, THAT THE
VOTE IN VITERBO WILL PROVIDE A POLITICAL TEST OF
ATTITUDES TOWARD NATIONAL ISSUES AND POLITICS.

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